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AUTHOR Tallon, James
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ABSTRACT

Data on interlibrary loan transactions occurring during July and August 1979 were analyzed to determine comparative turnaround and delivery times for 5 Quebec and 11 Ontario universities. The numbers of working days of positive responses for loans and photocopies and the numbers of positive and negative responses for combined loans and photocopies were calculated by subtracting the date that a request was made from the date when the request item or negative response was received. It was found that there is a considerable difference in turnaround times between Quebec and Ontario universities and for photocopies and loans; negative responses constituted 25.7 percent of the replies to requests made to Quebec universities and 27 percent of the requests to Ontario universities. Discussion of the findings includes suggestions for the improvement of interlibrary loan services, and four tables of data are appended. (RBF)

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Report on investigations into delays in the Interlibrary Loans process

James Tallon
Interlibrary Loans Librarian
June 1980

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1. Introduction

During the past year we have undertaken a number of studies concerning the length of time required to procure items through interlibrary loans and the delays attributable to various stages of the process or various alternatives that may be available at a given stage. Through such studies we hope to be able to determine reliable delay estimates for users of our service, and through the analysis of the data collected we hope to pinpoint more precisely the causes of delays in interlibrary loan transactions. This in turn may allow us to make significant improvements, through appropriate modification of means and procedures used, in the service we can offer.

The results of a number of these studies have previously been communicated: average delays in receiving materials from CISTI, Ontario universities (IUTS) and Quebec universities (PEBUQUILL)[1], borrowing and lending turnaround times for Concordia[2], and comparative delivery times of the Center for Research libraries and other document sources[3]. This report brings together and analyses data on comparative turnaround times, broken down by institution, for Quebec and Ontario universities.

2. Institutional Response Times Survey

The institutions chosen for this study are all university libraries on the PEBUQUILL/IUTS route. This is justified by the relative importance of such libraries as sources and the fact that PEBUQUILL/IUTS is sufficiently predictible to allow extrapolation from turnaround time as perceived at Concordia to the actual turnaround time of an institution.

Data is based on transactions occurring between January and August (inclusive), 1979. All figures are calculated (in working days) by subtracting the date that a request was made by telex from the date when the requested item (or a negative response) was received.

A summary of the results obtained follows. A detailed institutional breakdown is given in Appendix I: Tables I - IV.

	Requests	Low	High	Average	Midpoint
1. Positive response - Loans					
Ontario	108	1	11	3.9	3
Quebec	64	3	12	6.3	6

1. "Report on the Utilization of the CAN/OLE Online Document Ordering System (CAN/DOC) in Interlibrary Loan Operations", June 1980.

2. Memo of April 8, 1980 concerning turnaround times for SFL interlibrary loans.

3. "Center for Research Libraries; final report", September 1979.

	Requests	Low	High	Average	Midpoint
2. Positive response - Photocopies					
Ontario	45	2	24	7.8	7
Quebec	63	3	27	8.4	7
3. Positive response - Both types					
Ontario	153	1	24	5.1	4
Quebec	127	3	27	7.3	6
4. Negative response - Both types					
Ontario	57	1	37	5.3	4
Quebec	44	1	59	8.7	7

3. Analysis of Results Obtained

The specific results obtained for individual institutions should be regarded with some caution: sample sizes for some institutions are small and also service may change considerably in a short time period. None-the-less, given the tempering of these figures with knowledge derived from current experience, and given the constraints imposed by the Interlibrary Loans Code, the results obtained may provide a useful framework for the problem of selecting among alternate sources of ILL materials.

A number of interesting observations may be made at a general level:

1) There is a considerable difference in turnaround times between Quebec and Ontario Universities. In all categories Ontario averages are lower; for positive responses, both types, this difference is 2.2 days (or 43% longer). In part this may be explained by differences in the size and organization of the institutions from which we borrow in each province. However, it also indicates that there may be considerable room for improvement in this area in Quebec, and I recommend that we strongly support constructive efforts in this direction. Efforts are presently underway by CREPUQ to gather detailed information on Quebec ILL operations.

2) There is a significant difference in turnaround times for photocopies and loans, 2.2 days for Quebec institutions and 3.9 days for Ontario universities. There is a corresponding difference between the respective midpoints. Although these differences are shared by almost all institutions surveyed there is a large variation between institutions in the difference between average turnaround times for photocopies and loans. This difference ranges, for libraries with reasonably sized samples in both categories, from -1.4 days for OWTU to 5.9 days for OKQ. There are operations

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involved in the filling of photocopy requests that are not part of the process of filling loan requests. These include the production of copies and the matching of pages, and title and volume and year. However the large variation, among institutions, of differences between turnaround times for loans and copies suggests that the main contributing factors to the overall difference between turnaround times for loans and copies are specific procedures employed by particular institutions or derived from the organization of particular institutions. Such factors include whether or not photocopying is part of interlibrary loans operations, and, where it is not, how well the photoduplication services can handle interlibrary loans requirements, and ease of communication between the two departments.

An awareness of the size of the difference in turnaround times for photocopies and loans and recognition of its contribution to the overall speed of service offered by interlibrary loans is an essential first step in bringing an improvement in this situation. An attempt should be made, therefore, to make the results of this study available to ILL librarians in the institutions surveyed, and all libraries should be urged to examine this aspect of their operations.

3) Negative responses constitute a much higher percentage of total responses than had been anticipated, and are in virtue of this an important delay in the ILL process. Negative responses constituted, for the requests considered in this survey, 25.7% of replies to requests made to Quebec universities and 27% of requests made to Ontario universities.

It requires, furthermore, longer to determine that a library cannot supply a requested item than to receive materials that can be retrieved.[4] This difference is 0.2 days for Ontario institutions and 1.4 days for Quebec institutions.

The difference between time required for negative and positive responses varied considerably from institution to institution, ranging, for institutions with reasonable samples in each category, from 2.7 days for QMM and OKQ to 7.7 days for OTY. This seems to indicate that there do not exist a set of consistent and generally accepted principles concerning how long a request is to be held if the item is out on loan, missing, at binding, etc. Overall there appears to have developed a tendency to hold on to requests longer than is desirable if the ILL system is to function most efficiently.

Because of this strong indication that our procedures regarding negative responses are responsible for undue delay, it can be hoped that by bringing this situation to the attention of other librarians some, perhaps substantial, progress can be made. I personally would favor

4. A problem which was first brought to my attention by A.T.J. Hobbins and described in his "Report and Survey to Investigate Delays in Obtaining Material on Interlibrary Loans". McGill University. September, 1979.

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adoption of a general policy of rapid response, within three days, to problem requests.[5] When appropriate this response may advise the borrowing library to request the item again after the due date if out on loan or after a reasonable searching period if missing. Although this might imply a certain amount of additional communication on the part of both lending and borrowing institutions it would be compensated for by the fact that the borrowing library, if in possession of additional locations for the item, could submit the item to another location without delay. Since it is common that the borrowing library has several locations for an item, this procedure should result in a reduction in turnaround times for a substantial number of ILL transactions.

In addition to this general policy of rapid response suggested above it might also be useful to attempt to bring into effect the solution to the negative response problem proposed by Mr. Hobbins in the report cited above. This proposal is that there should be established and recognized by the Interlibrary Loan Code a symbol that indicates to a library that it is a unique Canadian location for an item. The receipt then, of a request with such a symbol would indicate to the lending library that it could retain the request for a longer period before sending its response.

Previous studies have shown however, that for Concordia there is no advantage, in average turnaround time, to Canadian locations not on PEBUQUILL/IUTS over American locations. Perhaps, then, the fact that the borrowing library has additional Canadian locations for a request is not the most important factor that should be considered in determining whether it should request the lending library to give special treatment to the request; rather the borrowing library should be more concerned about whether there are additional Canadian locations within the particular network, environment or delivery system in which it operates. A modification of the unique Canadian location symbol proposal, to the effect that the symbol simply designate that the borrowing library desires, for whatever reason, that the lending library hold on to a request for a longer period if there are difficulties, might therefore be a more effective solution to the negative response delay problem.

As with the problem raised in the previous section, attempt should be made to make these considerations available to ILL librarians in other libraries.

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5. I am not considering here requests that for which a lending institution must attempt verification.

TABLE I

POSITIVE RESPONSE - LOANS

	Requests	Low	High	Average	Midpoint
1. Ontario					
OHM	14	2	6	3.5	3
OKQ	15	1	11	5.2	5
OLU	10	3	11	7.1	7
OOCC	19	2	7	3.1	3
OOU	7	1	5	2.3	2
OPAL	1	10	10	10.0	10
OPcT	1	3	3	3.0	3
OTU	9	2	7	3.2	3
OTY	9	2	4	2.7	3
OWA	11	1	7	3.2	3
OWTU	12	2	7	4.1	3
	108	1	11	3.9	3
2. Quebec					
QLB	3	3	9	5.3	4
QMM	15	4	11	7.5	8
QMU	20	4	10	5.7	5
QQLA	22	3	12	6.1	5
Q Sher U	4	5	9	6.5	6
	64	3	12	6.3	6

TABLE II

POSITIVE RESPONSE - PHOTOCOPIES

	Requests	Low	High	Average	Midpoint
1. Ontario					
OHM	1	5	5	5	5
OKQ	9	7	19	11.1	10
OLU	1	11	11	11	11
OOCC	7	4	10	7.4	9
OOU	2	5	6	5.5	5.5
OPAL	-	-	-	-	-
OPcT	-	-	-	-	-
OTU	12	2	20	7.6	7
OTY	-	-	-	-	-
OWA	8	3	24	7.4	4
OWTU	5	3	7	4.8	5
	45	2	24	7.84	7
2. Quebec					
QLB	1	4	4	4	4
QMM	37	4	27	9.7	8
QMU	14	3	14	6.6	6
QQLA	7	3	8	4.7	4
Q Sher U	4	5	23	9.5	5
	63	3	27	8.4	7

TABLE III

POSITIVE RESPONSES - BOTH TYPES

	Requests	Low	High	Average	Midpoint
1. Ontario					
OHM	15	2	6	3.6	3
OKQ	24	1	19	7.4	5
OLU	11	3	11	7.4	7
OOCC	26	2	10	4.3	3
OOU	9	1	6	3	2
OPAL	1	10	10	10	10
OPcT	1	3	3	3	3
OTU	21	2	20	5.7	4
OTY	9	2	4	2.7	3
OWA	19	1	24	4.9	3
OWTU	17	2	7	4.3	3
	153	1	24	5.1	4
2. Quebec					
QLB	4	3	9	5	3
QMM	52	4	27	9.1	8
QMU	34	3	14	6.1	6
QQLA	29	3	12	5.8	5
Q Sher U	8	5	23	8	5.5
	127	3	27	7.3	6

TABLE IV

NEGATIVE RESPONSES

	Requests	Low	High	Average	Midpoint
1. Ontario					
OHM	6	7	12	8.7	8
OKQ	9	1	14	4.7	3
OLU	6	4	8	6.8	7
OOCC	6	3	14	6	5
OOU	4	2	5	2.8	2
OPAL	1	2	2	2	2
OPcT	1	2	2	2	2
OTU	1	3	3	3	3
OTY	5	3	37	10.4	6
OWA	5	1	6	2.6	2
OWTU	13	1	7	3.8	4
	57	1	37	5.3	4
2. Quebec					
QLB	1	3	3	3	3
QMM	13	1	16	6.4	5
QMU	19	3	59	10.3	7
QQLA	7	1	23	8.3	6
Q Sher U	4	6	15	10.3	10
	44	1	59	8.7	7